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ORPHANAGES IN AMERICA: ARE THEY NEEDED?

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A Project  
Presented to the  
Faculty of  
California State University,  
San Bernardino

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In Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree  
Master of Social Work

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by

Cara Lynn Hans  
Lawrence Payne, Jr.

June 1997

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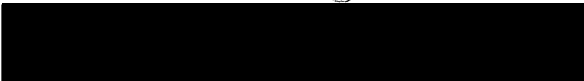
Cara Lynn Hans  
Lawrence Payne, Jr.

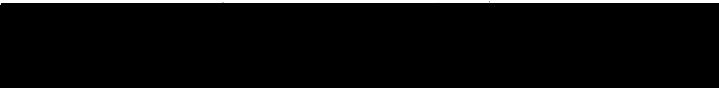
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## **ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this constructivist research study was to examine the idea of returning to the orphanage system, as a placement option for children who have been removed from their homes. The authors felt that this was especially important since lawmakers have been discussing this option as an answer to the question of welfare reform, and further felt that decisions such as these should not be made without the input of professionals in the social work field. Eleven administrators at a nonprofit child welfare agency were interviewed. The respondents overwhelmingly opposed the return to an orphanage system, and cited institutionalized childrens' inability to form and maintain intimate, bonded, long-term relationships and lack of therapeutic care as their main oppositions.

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### **Orphanages in America: Are They Needed?**

The return of America's orphanage has been an issue of debate for many years. Controversial questions that surround the debate include: Who wants the return of orphanages, what are their reasons for wanting the return to the orphanages, and is the return to orphanages needed?

One person who feels that orphanages are needed is House Speaker Newt Gingrich. According to a Press-Enterprise article (December 1994), Gingrich is not only in favor of orphanages, but he also believes that he can get them funded. However, Pollitt (1995) believes that the reason Gingrich is supporting the idea of orphanages is because he is thinking about welfare reform and social control. In other words, Gingrich is more interested in cutting welfare to single mothers and warehousing their children, than preserving nontraditional families. California's Governor Wilson has taken Gingrich's concept a step further. According to a Press-Enterprise (1997) article, Wilson is proposing that children be taken away from their parents if they can no longer afford them. The article also cited Wilson's proposal as stating that welfare mothers should be encouraged to consider voluntary adoptions, and that the counties should intervene with involuntary adoption or foster home placement.

In addition to politicians wanting children removed from their homes for financial reasons, there are abuse

issues that dictate the removal of children. Unfortunately, the question that must also be addressed in this matter is where these children will be placed. Rovner (1991) stated that our current foster care system is under enormous strain and that collapse is possible. Smith (1994) stated that in 1985, one out of twenty-one reports of child abuse/neglect resulted in the removal of a child, while in 1990, one out of three reports resulted in the removal of the child. In addition, Douglas (1994) reported that there are more than 350,000 children in foster care, of which only 70,000 will be adopted. Does the need for welfare reform and the strain on the foster care system demonstrate a need for orphanages?

The concept of orphanages has been around for a long time. Smith (1995) reported that prior to 1800, there were five orphanages in the United States, and by 1851 only 77. The number quickly multiplied and between the years from 1890 to 1903, 400 institutions were established. Consistent with a growth in the general population, the number of institutionalized children increased during the 1920s, through the growing use of free or boarding homes. The number of residents per so-called orphan asylum varied with large institutions such as the New York Catholic Protectory, which in 1891 housed 2,000 children at one time. However, many institutions housed relatively few. Despite the small number of large orphanages, many children lived in large institutions: in 1923, approximately 25,350 of all orphan

children lived in institutions holding from 250 to more than 1,500 children.

The institutions also varied in physical conditions and atmosphere. However, it is generally agreed that life in the pre-1920 orphanages and in many post-1920 orphanages, was likely to be regimented and sparse. Conditions were described as children segregated from the community and commanded by the sound of the cowbell, instead of word of mouth. Corporal punishment was common as was a lack of understanding for the need of educational opportunities. The decline in the use of institutions was preceded by at least 60 years of debate although it was concluded after the first 40 years, that family care was preferable to institutionalization (Smith, 1995).

If it was found that family care was preferable to that of institutionalization, this leads the authors to question why the removal of children based on financial reasons, is still being considered by politicians, when there are other alternatives that can be utilized to keep the child in the home? According to Whittaker (1995), intensive in-home crisis service and day treatment offered to parents in lieu of removing children have had success in keeping children in the home. Depending on the severity of the abuse or neglect, some counties are sending parents to counseling and anger management classes.

Keeping children in the home is considered to be the



least restrictive environment, and is the primary goal of helping agencies. However, when removal of children becomes necessary there are several options for placement. The first option for out-of-home placement is with relatives, and is sometimes referred to as Kinship Foster Care. According to Thornton (1991), kinship foster homes consist of adult extended relatives within the third degree who have been licensed to board a related minor dependent child. These relatives are related to the placed child through blood-ties and/or marriage. Both federal and state laws legitimize the practice of placing a dependent child with extended relatives and permitting them to receive the foster care rate of a given community equal to that of regular licensed foster homes.

Licensed foster homes is another option for placement which are slightly more restrictive. It should be noted that there are some excellent foster homes which children enter and have good life without any long-term damaging effects. However, research has shown that the foster care system have many problems. For example, Lyman and Bird (1996) cited that recent social work practice and policy views foster care as a last resort because of the perception that the harmful effects of removal from the home outweigh the benefits. Lyman and Bird (1996) further stated that these harmful effects include, problems with psychosocial issues, medical problems, high rates of behavioral and

school problems, and problems with self-esteem. Lyman and Bird (1996) also reported that the patterns of loss experienced by foster care children include the loss of family, peer relationships, and sense of community. All of these factors are likely to influence the way children view themselves. Also cited was the fact that multiple placements were found to be detrimental to self-esteem of children in foster care. These are by no means all the problems associated with foster care. According to a study by the Office of Justice and Delinquency, Bass (1995), one in five youths that came to a runaway shelter came from foster care, and more than one in four had been in foster care previously. The facts that these runaway youths, who are known as "system kids," are from foster care homes suggest that their needs have not been met.

The next level on the continuum of placement options are Residential Homes. These homes are usually called 'group homes' and the children interact with the community through the public schools, recreational centers, etc. The residents also receive psychological and other rehabilitative services. The next level of care are Residential Facilities which can be configured in several ways. Some facilities still allow the residents to have some interaction with the community, where other facilities are totally self-contained. Facilities such as these have their own schools, recreation and other needed operational

requirements. What both has in common are the type of children that they serve. Shennum and Carlo (1995), stated that for children placed out-of-home due to severe emotional, behavioral and family problems, residential treatment is often the only available service alternative. They also reported that residential facilities have fallen short in their efforts to create a warm, inviting, homelike atmosphere. Although professionals want to provide the best possible level of care, residential treatment facilities have historically been required to produce only a minimal amount of external accountability data. Therefore, it has been difficult to define and measure children's emotional improvement and well-being, although it is a fact that these children/youth still suffers the same psychological problems as their counter parts in the foster care system. The highest level of restriction on the placement continuum are juvenile probation and parole institutions, in which youth that are placed who have committed various crimes and are incarcerated for a length of time.

Although there has been a great deal of conversation about orphanages, there has not been any discussion as to their proposed structure. The structure would place orphanages somewhere along the placement continuum and would define the level of care. This in and of itself is interesting because it continues to explore the question as to why politicians feel that orphanages are necessary.

## **Research Questions**

This research focused on the controversy of removing children/youth from their families and placing them into the juvenile system. The reasons for removing these children ranged from legitimate child abuse/neglect issues to politicians looking for an avenue to decrease the cost of welfare. Just as the actual removal of the child is an issue, so is the placement of the child. These placements range from relative and foster homes to the current proposal of orphanages. Ironically, this controversy comes at a time when child care professionals are recommending that whenever possible, it is best to keep the child in the home.

Prior to starting the research, the authors were hoping that the study would provide them with additional knowledge on the current system. However, since the current system does not include orphanages, but rather residential institutions, the authors decided to focus their research on the possibility of returning to orphanage facilities. In order to establish a knowledge base that centers on the placement of children who are removed from their homes, the major research questions addressed in this study were as follows: What should our approach be to caring for children that are removed from their parents? What impact would orphanages have on the well-being of children? What are the issues that center around cost? What would be the most effective operational model?

### **Sample**

Erlandson, Harris, Skipper and Allen (1993) stated that the purpose of a research inquiry is to seek to resolve the problem by accumulating pertinent knowledge and information. This is accomplished through collaboration among the stakeholders in the social context being studied. A constructivist study is usually comprised of several rounds of information gathering from the stakeholders, who are the individuals and/or groups of individuals who are involved both directly and indirectly in all aspects of the organization. For the purpose of this study the various rounds may include orphans, social workers, politicians and administrators. A constructivist paradigm collects the opinions and experiences of stakeholders, and for the first round of study the authors chose to interview administrators. Jankowski, Videka-Sherman, and Laguidara-Dickinson (1996) stated that Qualitative research methodology is naturalistic and oriented to discovery rather than hypotheses testing. This method was chosen by the authors as they were seeking input and opinions of individual professionals with current, working knowledge in the field of child care and treatment.

As previously stated, the goal of the authors is to establish a knowledge base centering around opinions concerning the return of orphanages. In order to accomplish this goal, the authors performed the first round of the

constructivist study which involved the interviewing of administrators of a large residential institution in southern California. The interviews were done at the facility and ranged in length from thirty to forty-five minutes. Both authors were present during the interviews and each author took separate notes. All collected data were compiled, coded, and then sent back to the respondents for accuracy. Interviews were conducted by graduate social work students. To obtain a thorough understanding of the topic, additional rounds of research are necessary, and based on the results of this inquiry, an appropriate decision can be made in regard to returning to orphanages or utilizing other alternatives.

### **Method**

The orphanage sample of eleven administrators was drawn from a large nonprofit child and family services agency in Southern California, which has served society's most vulnerable children since its founding in 1800's. Today it treats and educates the most severely disturbed victims of abuse and neglect and also offers preventive services before it is necessary for the families to be separated. The respondents included one member from the Board of Directors, the Executive Director, the Assistant Executive Director, the Director of Research, the Director of Activity Therapy, The Director of Residential Program, the Director of Family

Preservation, the Director of Therapeutic Group Homes, the Director of Shelter Care/Assessment Center, the Director of Family Groups, and the Director of Foster Care. All of the above administrators possess master degrees and above, and many have professional licenses such as L.C.S.W. and M.F.C.C.. Their experience in the field ranges from ten to more than thirty years.

### **Findings**

"What Should Our Approach Be for Caring for Children that Are Removed From Their Caretakers?"

As mentioned earlier, the debate over the return of orphanages has continued over the last few years and the respondents to this question had a great deal to say. The findings associated with this question point overwhelmingly to keeping the child in the home or in the community. Two of the eleven respondents recommend that whenever possible, the preservation of the family should be the priority. Three of the eleven respondents stated that the main concern should be for the safety, protection and welfare of the child, which should include the child's mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs. The respondents also cited the importance of assessment in determining whether a child should or should not be removed, as well as any unique needs the child may have. They stressed that this assessment should be conducted as quickly and as thoroughly as

possible.

Five of the eleven respondents recommended that the biological parents be provided with various resources that would enable them to keep the children safe within the home. Three of the eleven staff stated that if the children must be removed from the biological parents, then an attempt should be made by professionals to place them in the same community in which they were already living. This can be accomplished by finding foster/group homes in their area.

Two of the eleven respondents recommended that children be placed in the "least restrictive environment" as possible. A foster home is considered the least restrictive environment and allows for the most opportunity for normal growth and learning. In addition, two of the eleven respondents stated that a spectrum of services should be provided to all the children as well as to the family as a whole.

Five of the eleven respondents felt very strongly on the issue of reunification. They recommended that the strength of the parents be recognized and focused on as a starting point in working with the family. Included in their statements is the concern for reunification or adoption of the children. Respondents felt that there should be permanency as soon as possible, because the longer the child is in the system, the more damage is done. One respondent stated that once the child is initially removed



from the home, there should be as few moves as possible, as when there isn't any permanency we create an adult that is institutionalized. Children lose everything when they are moved around, and we need to find innovative ways to provide permanency. Children need stability, nurturing and support, therefore treatment for these children should minimize their losses.

The unique needs of the children were also a concern of the respondents. Two of the eleven stated that the needs of the child should dictate treatment. Two other respondents discussed special needs such as physical/emotional disabilities, extra special needs such as behavioral problems, and cultural issues. They recommended that these needs be considered at all times, especially for placement decisions. Another respondent recommended that African American children be placed in African American homes. Two of the eleven respondents recommended that the system provide not only quality care, but continuing care as well. This can be accomplished by having the same social worker handle the case throughout its duration.

Two of the eleven respondents stated that although children are unique, a system that is good for a large setting should also be good for an individual child. One of the respondents to this question stated the following: "It is important to remember that a politically correct child, may not be a healthy child." Two other respondents stressed

the importance of being honest with children with regard to their situation. The system should also make sure that the needs of children are being met, and that a variety of diversified approaches are developed and utilized in order to accomplish this.

Placement alternatives were also an issue for the respondents. Two of the respondents stated that shelter/foster homes will always be needed, as well as residential facilities. One of the respondents to this question stated that children with more serious problems should be initially placed in Residential Treatment when needed, and should not have to fail several less restrictive placements before they receive help. Two other respondents discussed the cost of institutionalization. One stated that original orphanages ran off "bare bones," and that this was not an ideal situation. The other respondent cited that residential treatment is expensive, but it is good. Two other respondents recommended ongoing training for foster parents.

Other single comments made by respondents with regard to what approach should be used in caring for children who have been removed from their caretakers are as follows: In discussing orphanages the interpretation of the word is critical as an original orphanage is thought of as a building that warehouses children, and a treatment facility is something different. A return to orphanages, in the

original sense, would be a disaster. If orphanages would not be comparable to the treatment facilities available today, then we might as well leave children with the dysfunctional families. However, if orphanages could have the resources needed, then they would work. If these treatment resources were not available, then the focus should remain on institutional care. Original settlement houses came from religious backgrounds. Most institutions are no longer allowed by law to incorporate religious teachings of any kind, and one respondent felt that this may be something that is missing since it gave children a foundation. Another respondent stated that although the emphasis should be on caring for children, this is difficult when the juvenile court must be petitioned every six months in order to continue treatment, and sometimes the child is returned home against the recommendations of treatment professionals. Sometimes the system creates obstacles that should not be there, which makes the system become overburdened, and subsequently the issues become clouded. When this occurs, it causes further stress to the children, and often prevents or delays reunification.

Unfortunately, abuse can also occur in foster homes and this is often more traumatic than what the child originally experienced. This seems hard to fathom, but since there is usually some kind of caring in the family home, the abuse is sometimes offset by good experiences or periods of remorse

on the part of the caretaker. When children are in abusive, foster homes, there is often no love, nurturing or caring occurring at all. Respondents felt that foster parents should have a good motive for wanting children, and that emphasis should be given to bettering foster homes. Providers of therapeutic foster care should receive ongoing therapy within the system to lessen the rate of burnout among providers. In discussing the care of children in general, respondents felt that siblings should always be kept together, while still maintaining the quality and continuity of care, and that a range of services can be provided in a group home setting. There should be strict regulations not only in meeting the initial medical and dental needs of the child, but in continually monitoring the child's progress. More preventive services are needed, and children age 15 and older should be taught independent living skills. Preventive services are also needed and service providing agencies should be monitored to ensure regulations are being adhered to.

Parents must protect their children from harm and danger. If this does not occur, and the child must be removed, then the family and the child should have contact throughout the duration of the separation, even if it needs to be supervised. If reunification of the family is not possible, then there needs to be clearer guidelines for agencies regarding when children are free for adoption. The

rights of the parents should be protected, but not at the detriment of the child.

In summary, respondents expressed an overall concern for families as a whole and felt that more alternatives for preventive services are needed. The more opportunities that families have for preventive services, the less likely that removal of the children will be necessary. However, if removal is necessary, respondents were equally concerned about the unique needs of the child and family being assessed as quickly and accurately as possible, services being implemented, and a plan for the child's permanency being developed. This area included the possibility that the child may need to be initially placed in residential care, which although the most costly, is the most effective and appropriate in some cases. The respondents agreed that because cost is almost always an issue, children must often fail several less restrictive placements before they receive the level of care needed and that this is very emotionally damaging. Unfortunately, this results in even longer stays within a residential setting.

#### What Impact Would Orphanages Have on The Well-Being Of Children?

Five of the eleven respondents had strong feelings as to what impact orphanages would have on children. They stated that the impact would be devastating and that society

would be in big trouble. Respondents supported this statement by explaining that children who are warehoused develop problems with bonding and social behavior. These five respondents summarized the impact as follows: They felt that orphanages would not provide a family setting and growing up in a system such as this would impede a child's ability to form and maintain relationships. If children grow up without the ability to form relationships, they do not learn empathy and respect of other people. One respondent stated that there would be a disengagement, a gradual decline in wellness and in emotional health. Another respondent stated that children who are in need of this care, have no central family and they swing toward antisocial behavior. A return to the original orphanages would have a horrendous impact on antisocial behaviors. Many of these children, who already feel unloved, would be placed in a large system and they would get lost. The impact of orphanages versus residential would not be the same. Residential institutions develop an individual treatment plan for each child and each child receives specialized care, whereas orphanages only house, clothe and educate children without any form of treatment. Another respondent cited that in one aspect, the return of the orphanage system would normalize out-of-home care for some children. However, this would be at the expense of children who would not learn to have intimate relationships, and

these bonds are necessary for a child to function within society.

Another respondent felt that the return of orphanages would not be anything great, and would only be a warehouse for children. Other considerations for determining whether orphanages would be successful would be who would run them and what their level of dedication would be. One respondent felt that the impact of orphanages would be both good and bad. The character of the American family is changing rapidly, and about one half percent of children is institutionalized. No matter how great the institutional care is, it is still not normal. The respondent continued by stating that institutional care impacts how children view themselves, and in turn how they value themselves. Although, children can get negative messages as a result of institutional care, negative family messages can be just as damaging.

Eight respondents voiced their concerns on the issues surrounding orphanages. One of these respondents felt that the term 'Orphanage' would need to be defined and/or redefined because the children currently in institutional care are not 'orphans'. The respondent continued also stated that orphanages would only work if you forgot about the money. Meaning, that if orphanages could be run without regard to funding, and implementing all of the needed programs, then they could be successful.

Another respondent stated that orphanages can do a fair job of housing, feeding, and clothing children. However, if what we want is for children to function as best as they can, then orphanages are not the best option. The respondent continued by stating that the original orphanages did not have a treatment component and there was no strong emphasis on reunification. Orphanages can help with the well-being of children if they are better than the home from which the children came. As professionals, we need a consensus on what we want as an outcome and what a child needs to develop. Another respondent felt that if any child has to live in an institutional setting, then he or she is in a bad environment. Children who have to live in an institution do not feel like other children, and it is essential that children feel normal. Orphanages in the long run do not give children self-esteem and normalcy, nor do they provide continuity. The respondent continued by stating that children are very resilient and still have hope and ability to commit, which may be in part because of their profound need for protection.

Another respondent stated that orphanages or institutions are necessary for some children that have serious emotional and behavioral problems, but this should be the last placement resort. Long-term care can either be given in a large institution or a small placement, so there is at least a continuity of place while at the same time,



still meeting the need of permanency. Institutions or group homes should try to achieve family-like settings which include parent-child relationships, and the sense of community. Another respondent felt that we cannot just warehouse children without treating their problems. The respondent also felt that a placement should be where a child could receive short-term support and could realize that not all adults are abusive. The child could also see unity and modeling from a team of helping professionals.

Three of the eleven respondents discussed their concern for children. One respondent felt that children cannot complete the developmental process without permanency, and that if children continue to move, they lose everything. Another respondent stated that children need to see that the whole world is not sick, and that they need to feel that they are a priority. They also need to feel safe, and if they do not feel safe, they can tell one of the staff. The respondent continued by stating that the bottom line is that you absolutely cannot just house children because what they have seen and experience does not disappear. Another respondent stated that children raised in institutional settings do not develop lifelong relationships. When children do have family members, although they may not be appropriate for placement, these relationships need to be fostered and managed, because most children go home at some point. Generally speaking, institutional care is not the

best because children are not able to develop intimate primary relationships.

Three of the eleven respondents also discussed the need for family preservation and reunification. One of these respondents stated that children should be left with their parents and that the parents should be provided with resources. Another respondent questioned how detrimental the home is, compared to the system? The respondent felt that family preservation is what's needed. The respondent continued by saying children are often removed unnecessarily, and/or not returned home soon enough. Children are more damaged by being bounced from foster home to foster home, than by what caused the original removal. Another respondent stated that some children have never felt that they were in a family, and that reunification is now the focus.

Four respondents discussed problems with the turnover of staff and how this relates to bonding. One of the respondents felt that children in institutions formed attachments with staff, but understand that they will not be permanent. This respondent also felt that staff do not have the same commitment as a parent, although they are devoted. Another respondent stated that there is less opportunity for abuse if children are in residential care, but high staff turnover often affects the ability of children to connect or form intimate relationships. One of these respondents felt

that the down side of institutional care is the rotation of staff, since many of these children have already had disrupted care taking. Another respondent stated that the quality of interactions that a child has is the most important. The problem with institutions is staff turnover. This creates an illusion of a caring family which for a brief time is good, but over the long-term is an aberration. This may color what the child expects out of human relationships, and he or she may recreate or replay these short-term relationships later in life.

Three of the eleven respondents voiced their concerns about foster care and residential homes/facilities. One respondent felt that it is best to start with the least restrictive settings; taking into consideration however, that foster parents are not mental health specialists. What is needed is therapeutic foster care with foster parents and therapists. Another respondent felt that we cannot get at some issues because of the restraints with training parents. We must believe the child, and we must do a better job at all levels. Child Protection Services should place children in a family setting if at all possible, and there needs to be more monitoring of foster homes/parents. Another respondent felt that children in foster homes developed stronger bonds than those in group homes. Another respondent expressed their concern over grief and loss, and estimated that 90 percent of the work done with the children

is centered around these issues.

In summarizing the respondents' feedback, it was unanimously felt that if there was a return to orphanages in the original sense, which were mainly a place to warehouse children, then this would have a devastating impact on the country. As a result of children receiving only the basic necessities in a sterile environment, they do not develop the capacity to establish and/or maintain intimate relationships. It is through these relationships that children learn respect for themselves, and ultimately for other people, and without this feature people are much more prone to antisocial and in some cases violent behavior. Although this can also be a problem in residential institutions, the implementation of individual and group therapy, as well as individual case planning can offset some of the damage. It was also felt that the success of an attempt to return to an orphanage system would ultimately depend on the amount of money available with which to run the system and the level of dedication of those implementing the program.

#### What Are the Issues That Center Around Cost?

The question concerning cost set off sparks that led to some interesting discussion for nine of the eleven respondents. Two of the respondents were concerned about decision making. They questioned who was going to pay for

care, how long, for whom, and when. They stated that money is needed to raise a child, and since a child is dependent, adults need to take the responsibility to fulfill those basic needs. There is also a further need and social responsibility to give children recreational and other extracurricular activities to stimulate growth. There are different philosophies about who should pay for this. Some felt it should be a combination of government and private funding. One of the respondents questioned whether funding was based on morality. What are people's values, what do they perceive, and how does the system value the child? Cost in itself is a value. Four of the respondents discussed how cost will always be a battle. For example, therapeutic foster homes are double the cost of non-therapeutic homes, and the perception of cost associated with treatment will not change. It is difficult for people to translate dollars into therapeutic impact, and equally difficult for them to think about family prevention. Pain and emotional impact of abuse builds as time goes on, and professionals could do so much more with one year of therapy right after the trauma, than thirty-five years afterwards.

Four of the respondents discussed the actual cost of some programs/treatments. For example, a residential program in Los Angeles could cost \$4,400 per month and some foster homes could cost \$3,500 per month. The Los Angeles County budget crisis dictates much of what the Department of

Children and Family Services decides with regard to placement of children. A child could cost up to \$60,000 a year in the system, and staffing accounts for the majority of money spent. Cost effectiveness is the issue. There is a major cost difference when the children are kept in the home. It may cost up to one million dollars to have a child in residential care from birth to age 18, and if the child is in a foster homes then the cost would be a fraction of this. In most circumstances the federal government provides 50 percent of the needed funding, while the countries provide 30 percent and the states contribute 20 percent. Money can make a tremendous impact upon the decision regarding whether or not to place a child, and the pressure is not to place because of the cost.

Five of the eleven respondents focused on what should be done about funding, stating that there is never enough money to do the job right. Even monitoring the system will cost a lot, and therefore the system should be creative. The funding streams drive services, and we need to look at spending money sooner, which in the long run would cost less. Top dollar is needed if you don't take care of childrens' problems right away, the psychological damage is increased and remains an issue for a longer period of time. Overall funding is not there for children like it should be. Funding for prevention should be proactive and not reactive. Money should be invested into families and not spent on

institutional cost, and people should be allowed to be self-sufficient. Funding should also be geared toward fixing social problems that create the stresses that lead to the children being removed. We need to work to develop communities so that jobs are available within reasonable distance from housing. In addition, more funding is needed to develop the skills and abilities of paraprofessionals such as child care workers in order to enhance the quality of care.

We must also make sure that money is used correctly. This too, can make a difference with a child who will make it versus one that will not. We must design good care for less money. An agency may raise five dollars, but four of them will come from government. As managed care becomes an issue, it may affect institutional care by giving a set amount of money with which to treat the child, and the institution would have to decide what the child needs. This would probably increase the level of assessment and force better use of money. One of these respondents felt that cost issues will not change. People's attitudes should change toward an attitude of volunteering and donations should follow. Another major concern is that society should realize that these problems are not happening somewhere else. We spend more on corrections than on education. People have to accept that in working with children and families that there are a lot of judgment calls and that

sometimes mistakes are made. If this work was as simple as completing a check list, then a clerk could make decisions that affected families.

Five respondents discussed how important services and resources were, and felt that we must have a range of therapeutic services that include individual and group therapy, as well as innovative education. For example, inner city school environments serve children who already have problems and really cannot make it in a poor school system. Some people do not need counseling, but rather resources and money. Therefore, families should not be overburdened with counseling. One of the respondents stated that some children are in a black hole as far as services, as their problems are so deep that they will never achieve independence. Group care can be designed with fewer services for less money and it is much cheaper to have children in community care than residential care. Just like the medical field, it is more cost effective to provide preventive care than inpatient care. Aftercare was an issue that was discussed by two of the respondents. They felt that aftercare should also be funded and that children must receive money so that they could continue to function. One respondent stated that there is always a push for money for placement, but not for funding other family-based services which could prevent placement or make reunification possible. There are two types of services, one where the



child is the client and the other where the family unit is the client. Social and economical issues are factors that need to be addressed and managed. Parent are experiencing dangerous situations that can be corrected if they had resources. In addition, parents lack knowledge, and social workers can treat this by being allowed to spend time in the home.

Three of the eleven respondents discussed funding related problems that centered on therapeutic and residential homes/facilities. One respondent felt that therapeutic homes should receive money. Therapeutic foster care home's carry a high rate so that the county avoids them if possible, and this is an ongoing battle. Another respondent felt that we should get children out of residential treatment and they should be kept at home. The last respondent stated that children have to fail many other placements before group homes are considered. At this point, a longer residential stay is necessary to overcome the problems the children are having as a result of the placement failures, as well as that of the original abuse.

Three of the eleven respondents discussed other concerns about the system. One of the respondents stated that the system should be fair. Another respondent stated that children have seriously emotional, educational, and developmental problems by the time they get to some facilities. The "system" does not value children, and

children do not have the ability to protect themselves. In speaking for those children, you speak for your own children. The last respondent felt that children who have to be removed from their families should be kept together, even if they need to be at different levels of care. Paraprofessionals are not equipped to deal with the problems that some of these children have, and therefore matching children to foster parents is essential. Interruptions in foster care placements often affect the length of the overall case, as the more loss and abandonment issues the child has, the more therapeutic work is needed.

In summary, the respondents felt that there needs to be a much greater focus on funding for services for families, which would reduce the need, and therefore the cost, of out-of-home placement. Unfortunately, this funding is very hard to get because society as a whole does not value children and children are not able to protect or speak for themselves. As a result, funding can only be justified and approved through studies and projected cost savings. This is very hard to project when the subjects are children and families. Therefore, it is very difficult to get funding for preventive services. Many felt that society has a moral obligation to care for, provide for, and educate those children who are in need, and that funding should come from public, private, and governmental sources.

### What Would Be the Most Effective Operation Model?

Whether children are in, foster homes or residential facilities, there should be a model that will assist children with their problems. There are many models in operation and some of them are extremely effective. The respondents stated their suggestions and concerns with regard to what a good model should entail.

Five of the eleven respondents discussed therapy, behavior modification, nurturing/love and structure. One respondent stated than an operational model should have therapy. For example: Psychodynamic/play therapy, cognitive therapy for self-esteem, and group therapy, all of which should focus on how to build and maintain relationships. There must be a team approach and children should be taught alternative behavior. The model should be eclectic and the team approach should be tailored to the family's issues. Behavior modification is effective, utilizing sticker charts and reward systems. Another respondent felt that the model must provide therapy, love and nurturing, and that there must be a balance between nurturing and therapeutic treatment. Love helps a lot, but there is a struggle with staff regarding how to give nurturance and still be legally safe. One respondent stated that the model should provide group and individual therapy, although it is not necessary for every child. The main streaming element is essential, and the child welfare system

should adopt this language. Children need experience in risk taking and in failure, so they can succeed in the real world.

Another respondent felt that we should get away from the negative and focus on the positive aspects of both the child and the family. This respondent also felt that foster homes have more levels for children, as well as extra gifts and more challenges. Children respond to consistent structure, approach and philosophy, all of which are the foundation of treatment. It is important to stay structured so that staff does not have to reinvent the wheel, but can spend time with the children studying and/or doing activities. The structure should continually work toward the children making more and more of his or her own choices for the future. One of the respondents stated that what is needed is a super structure that meets the best of the childrens' general needs. These children have been very limited, and life has been a major survival for them. They must be given a chance to do something. Two of the respondents felt that the model should address services, resources and training. Foster parents should address the various needs of the family. In other words, pull together as many needs and resources as possible to help families.

The Los Angeles County model of Family Preservation is good in that it tries to address as many different service needs as possible for families to keep children safe,

protected and cared for in the home environment. Another respondent stated that the model should depend on the level of emotional disturbance that the children display. The model needs to be clear, if the children do something good or bad, then there should be a set structured response. Various levels are also for the staff, as it assists them in being consistent. We should get "system kids" in a framework where they are ready to please, and discipline should evolve around them earning certain privileges. Another respondent stated that there should be a good assessment of the problem, and we need a system that will respond quickly to the needs of the children.

Two of the eleven respondents voiced their concerns about the family, services, and the question regarding the definition of success. One of the respondents questioned whether or not the child was being separated from the family, and how much damage has been done. This respondent stated that the counties try to localize services, which is important. However, the down side is that the rendering of services is based on the collaboration of separate entities, which can be exciting and frustrating at the same time. The key is that everyone has to buy into the program, including the family. The other respondent discussed various suggestions as well as concerns for the system as a whole. The respondent felt that child care centers are in it for the money and not for the children, and that bus drivers

make more money than social workers. Staff needs a 12-step program or some kind of support so that they are not just hanging out there by themselves. If parents are not a viable avenue for caretaking, it is important to build on, and build up a child's resiliency. There are no simplistic answers and not every child can be saved. Again the question becomes, what is success? If the child is not in a government program or prison as an adult, then is he or she considered a success?

### **Discussion**

The results of the study clearly stressed that not only is a return to orphanages not needed, but if this occurred it would have a devastating impact on our society. The only acceptable exception, if indeed this had to occur, would be if the orphanages were run with the same financial and therapeutic resources that are currently available in residential facilities. The respondents overwhelmingly stated that children must not be warehoused and that they should grow up in a family environment. The respondents also indicated that children should not be removed from their homes with the frequency that they currently are, and that "family preservation" is not only the favored method of intervention, but that it should be implemented whenever possible without jeopardizing child safety. This could be accomplished by assessing the problems in the home and then

determining if family preservation can be utilized. If so, social workers can work with the family on an ongoing basis while keeping the family intact.

Keeping the children in the home not only lessens their emotional damage, but also saves a great deal of money, by providing services and resources on an outpatient basis. When removal of children is necessary, they should be placed in the least restrictive environment possible, and at the very least should be able to remain in their community. Keeping the child in the least restrictive environment and in their own community will allow them to maintain existing relationships and also lessen emotional damage. This is quite a contrast to the issue of "Returning America's Orphanage." Orphanages generally have restrictive environments and would most likely not be in the child's community. Once the child is removed from the home, there are two issues that should be evaluated immediately. The first issue is that of family reunification which means that the family is offered services which ensure that if the child is returned home, he or she can remain there safely. The second issue is that of permanency, which is the mandate that every child has the right to be placed in a permanent environment as soon as possible. If it is not possible for the child to return home, then permanency may mean long-term foster placement, guardianship, or adoption. As previously stated, when children are bounced around within the system

or stay in the system for a long time, this causes a great deal of emotional damage.

Funding issues were cited as one of the major problems in caring for children and youth. The controversy focused on the amount of money society is willing to pay in order to ensure that a child will grow up to be a productive adult. If society does not provide opportunities for children to become both emotionally and physically healthy we will not only pay for them as children, but will continue to pay for them as adults as well. One of the respondent's eloquently stated: "The needs of the child should dictate treatment, and not funds." In other words, for these "system kids" to make it as adults, we must treat their problems now, regardless of the cost. If we fail to address the problems associated with being a "system kid," then the expenditure for their care simply moves from one budget to another. Social Services monies for foster, group home or residential care to Criminal/Penal monies for care during incarceration. For example, Whittaker (1995) cited that a child in a California state mental hospital could cost \$299 per day. The average length of a stay is 128 days, and would be a total cost of \$38,272. According to a Press-Enterprise article (August 1994), it cost California approximately \$36,000 per year to incarcerate a prisoner, whether it is a juvenile or an adult. Even more profound is the cost of operating California's projected 81 prisons in the year



2003, which is estimated at \$6.8 billion. As a society, if we expect to assist people with becoming successful adults while at the same time reducing related taxes, then we must address America's social problems more efficiently.

There is a tremendous need for further research on this topic. As previously stated, this is the first round of a Constructivist Study which focused on Administrators of a child welfare agency. Other rounds should include children in the juvenile system and specifically residential treatment, facility teachers, line staff, social workers, governing boards, and politicians at the city, county, state and federal levels. In addition to these stakeholders, further research should focus on the percentage of children from foster care and residential institutions who are either in prisons, mental facilities, or homeless. The results from these studies would tell us whether or not we are helping "system kids" and hopefully with the knowledge obtained. We can correct any discrepancies.

### **Conclusion**

The profession of social work must be proactive in the administration and policy arena. The profession was founded not only to protect children, but to advocate for them as well. Social workers should also enter the media arena to introduce new concepts, advocate, and provide knowledge on current concepts. The profession must also be proactive in

the community intervention arena so that the citizens will be well informed about problems and solutions pertaining to their community. In addition, social workers must not forget that direct practice occurs every time there is a contact with an individual, a group, or an agency. There is no better way to express concepts and bring about change than the direct practice arena.

If the social work profession can accomplish these things, then controversies such as "The Return of America's Orphanages" could be discussed intelligently around the nation. Then, perhaps we as a society will not invent a system that would add to, or perpetuate the problems that plague the people whom we are trying to help.

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